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anything we
do right now,
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'Oh, that's
awesome!'"

MGMT tell it like it is



"We've
got nothing
to prove...
but everything
to prove"

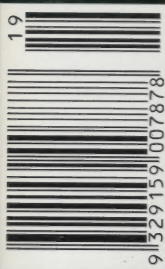
THE VINES
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SIX reasons to have the Vines on your cover every single month...

1. New album *Melodia* violently changes your mood every two minutes. In their words, it's "dark", "mental", "sweet", "compassionate", "evil", "spiritual", "sand-in-your-teeth-punk" and "like a disgruntled pig" — and it's madder than a boxful of distortion pedals. Call us an ambulance!

2. Craig Nicholls is getting younger. This freakishness will pull in more readers, no? And yet the Vines' mere presence will probably piss off every other band in the mag, the thought of which is quite amusing.

3. Drummer Hamish openly stuck a copy of *jmag* into his bag after the interview — something bands NEVER do, because they don't want to give you the satisfaction.

4. The Vines are that rare breed who don't demand cover approval. These days it seems

the merest mention of a band on a page warrants pic approval by a platoon of publicists — and no one at *jmag* could forget that painful episode when not one, but two of the artists on our cover required three weeks to choose one photo each. And they both picked a shot where their co-star looked rooted.

5. Their management company can make you weep with the sentimentality of it all when they tell you the tale of how they first tracked down the Vines, through floods, plagues of locusts and bad karma from venues who'd already had the privilege.

6. They'll raise the bar for the next cover stars, who will feel the pressure to develop some interesting character quirks and come out with quixotic pull quotes. Good.

: Jenny Valentish

Editor

PS — Get well soon, Cherry Bar



p 36

We don't want to ruin this nice moment
with a smart-arse photo caption



WHAT SONG MAKES YOU DANCE LIKE A DORK?

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gangster's paradise

Serial whisperer TRICKY returns with a roar on *Knowle West Boy*, a candid new album that recalls his wild youth on one of Bristol's most notorious council estates. We take him for a stumble down memory lane

Knowle West has a reputation for being a bleak, crime-riddled place. What was it like being raised there?

I grew up there from a baby — generations of my family come from there, all the way back to my great-grandparents. Very violent, but very family-oriented. I didn't know what the word "rape" was, I didn't know what "child molesting" was. If you do something to someone there, you deal with people's uncles and families — it's all so close knit. If you needed to borrow sugar you could go next door.

What are some of your fondest — or not so fond — memories of life on the estate?

My uncles were really violent guys. They fought every time there was a wedding or a funeral or family get-together. One uncle stabbed the other uncle, I'd see them fight in the road... but after every fight, you'd have to see each other in a couple of days and it'd all be forgotten until the next one.

Did you get into brawls as well?

I was very fucking lucky. One, I can't fight. And two, my uncles and grandfather had already made their name. They were notorious. My great grandad was a fist-fighter. He used to fight [notorious knuckle-fighter] the King of the Gypsies — they'd all go down and just drink and fight. One uncle did 30 years in jail, another one did 15. So by the time it came to me, I was protected — nobody would mess with me or my family.

So, no vices of your own then?

I was a thief. We had all kinds of criminals — drug dealers, thieves, guys doing professional violence. The pimp, though, was the lowest form of animal. It's funny how in American hip-hop now the pimp is a good thing. But me, I'd break into stores and warehouses. I'd go into clothes shops and put on leather jackets and run out with them. I'd break into cars, houses. You wanna go out, go to clubs, and you wanna have clothes and get accepted.

Do you ever go back?

I've still got mates and some family there, so yeah. Within 10 minutes everyone knows I'm there. It's that closeness — it gave me a sense of belonging. There ain't much family vibes anymore — you got kids bringing up kids. Obviously it's not a good area and a lot of bad things happened, but I wouldn't change it for the world.

So what's your family think about the album?

My uncle's heard it and he's so happy I called it *Knowle West Boy*. When I told him I was doing it, he said "Oh, the kids'll like that!" Because there's nothing up there for these kids. People nowadays say I'm famous or a superstar, but I'm the same person as I was when I lived there — so I must've been a superstar back then, too! On songs like 'Council Estate' [the album's first single], I'm saying to kids "You're a superstar, just waiting to happen". And it will.

: Tamara Sheward

fruits of the vines

Richard presents
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I READ with both humour and anger *NME*'s recent slagging of the Vines' *Greatest Hits*. Sure, a greatest hits collection after just three albums is questionable no matter what the band, but the vitriol from this English writer had nothing to do with that.

"We're sorry — they *weren't* the new Nirvana," it begins. It gets worse.

we found a screwy, screaming singer with a head full of amazing melodies and riffs

Word like "musically deficient" and "blandness" are also thrown in with little thought.

The beginnings of the Vines were very strange times. But as strange as they were, I never remember Craig Nicholls & co saying, "Hi, we're the new

Nirvana." It was a fresh millennium. Nirvana had died a good seven years before, and the cycle of rock was spinning closer to a new musical revolution.

Well, that was the hope anyway. In Nicholls, we found a screwy, screaming singer with a head full of amazing melodies and riffs. The press wanted this band to be rock's new saviour, the ground zero from which we could build afresh and wipe away the dross of the late '90s.

I was caught up in the excitement, too. I heard the demos of the album from their original manager who lived across the road. They were rough, but good. I saw them play before anyone knew them and they were shambolic. I lost interest, but once the first 7" singles started coming ('Factory', then 'Gross Out'), the anticipation started building again. Quite simply, they nailed one of the best debut albums with *Highly Evolved*. If there was one thing the band hadn't quite mastered though, it was the ability to pull it off live. And for that they were crucified.

Two days after their first major Australian shows in Melbourne, I had Craig and their then-bass player Patrick live on my Sunday night show. The first voice break was affable and fun. I was a fan and they knew it. When I said we'd come back after a track and talk about their live shows and some negative reports from Melbourne, the mood changed.

The second part of the interview was one of the strangest moments I've experienced: Craig got seriously agitated, Patrick got nervous, and I tried to hold it all together. The reviews couldn't be ignored, but the ire from Craig towards me that night is something I'll never forget. I hope he has, but I have no idea as we've never crossed paths since.

The next day they recorded a *Live At The Wireless* set in our studios which to this day we've never aired. I chose to stay away for the sake of the session, but apparently it was unusable. No one had figured Craig out at this stage. It all became clear once he was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome that there were bigger forces at play in his head.

The Vines were not the new Nirvana. They were never going to be. So ignore that English twat and believe me when I say Nicholls is a seriously gifted musician with an amazing head for rock'n'roll songs. They got to make album No.4 and I'm happy to say I'm still a fan.

: Richard Kingsmill

WORDS : Jenny Valentish
PHOTOS : Cybele Malinowski

As long as **NO ONE GETS HURT...**

The days of the **VINES** climbing the walls are gone
— with new album Melodia, they're facing the music and fronting up



"TALKING to me is like banging your head against a brick wall," Craig Nicholls announces unexpectedly at the tail-end of a meandering spiel about guitars (sort-of conclusion: "fucking boring").

Despite my protests to the contrary, he's right, you know. Interviewing the Vines is a bit of a bandy-legged dance. You start off forthright and end up desperately throwing shit around and seeing what sticks.

We're all tucked in around a table in the Vines' management company (surrounded by gold and platinum discs hung by proud parents Andy Kelly, Andy Cassell and Pete Lusty), because in these post-Asperger-Syndrome-diagnosis days, everything must be done by routine. Which means no splitting up, no amber refreshments and definitely no bugging off to the pub. This is awkward.

Still, everyone's relaxed and chipper as they amble in, brimming with enthusiasm for new album, *Melodia*. At turns fragile and forceful, it's packed with smokin' burnouts countered with harmonies you never saw coming. Quieter acoustic numbers crash down into minor chords of heartbreaking beauty and can't-put-your-finger-on-it sadness (witness epic centrepiece 'True As The Night'), while the self-referential fun of first single 'He's A Rocker' sets the pace for the headsmacking numbers. It's also the most lyrically personal album yet, depending on who you believe — Craig laughs off such notions from his bandmates.

The sleepy-eyed kid with the haywire hairdo is known for being the recluse in the corner of the hotel after-party, but today he's genially holding court. And when he rolls in his seat and ends a panicked ramble with a huge inhale of relief, his mates guffaw good-naturedly like they're sitting around watching *The Simpsons*.

"Hamish is the funny one; Brad's the surfer; Ryan's the fucking scrapper; I'm the space cowboy," Craig is surmising. ("The good-time Charlie; the guy who nothing fazes; the right-hand man and the director," manager Andy Kelly smiles later). "Wayne [Connolly] who did *Vision Valley* used to call me and Ryan partners in crime, but we didn't actually commit any crimes. We went to school together so we've got a long history of mucking up. Bottles get thrown sometimes, knives..."

"Eggs, toilet paper, detergent in the fountain, all that sort of stuff," Hamish finishes. Ryan grins.

Revelation No.1

■ The Vines get on really well

"WE DID all live together, but the house burned down when we were, like, in the air," the ever-economical Ryan says mysteriously. Yep, despite having been run out of town on numerous occasions (name your town), the Vines take life with an easy shrug and just the occasional spazz out.

"We haven't had any major brawls," Craig insists, although popular legend has him copping a hiding from former bassist Patrick Matthews, who defected to Youth Group. "We've come close but we haven't had a full-on band fight with everyone involved. I've heard of it happening and that it's a really cleansing, good thing."

And then there's the extended, less dysfunctional family. Many of the team at the label and management company are musicians themselves, and clearly feel protective of their charges. That's nice.

"It is nice because I don't really know about what's happening too much, just about our album," Craig agrees. "That's why sometimes the things I say don't make a lot more sense, or because I've been listening to the Super Furry Animals so much. Everyone here's really good, so it's good I don't have to think about anything too hard."

It's still tough going, though. Craig gets distracted halfway through questions or shrugs them off like a child being made to wear an anorak. Film and comedy references are dumped into sentences making him sound unfathomably profound and it's assumed you'll know what he's talking about. Or it's not cared that you won't. He keeps returning to favourite phrases over and over — today it's "I play for keeps", which he reckons should go on the cover of *jmag* (along with everyone else's cover, no doubt) — and has a curious habit of saying: "It's like I was saying before," when he wasn't. Ask him which song is his favourite and he'll veer agonisingly between one and another like a child choosing a choc top. Then someone else will vouch for a third song and he'll whip back in wonder with: "Yeah, that's *my* favourite!"

Yes, as I plant my trekking pole and struggle for the summit of my line of questioning, he systematically cuts me off at the pass every bloody time.

"But being in a band is perfect for Craig," says ever-affectionate manager Andy Kelly later, "because when someone's always looking after you, all you have to do is write songs. He's said before that if the band hadn't happened, he'd be homeless. And it's true, I reckon."

Another constant in Vinesworld is producer Rob Schnapf, who's teamed up with the band for the first time since *Highly Evolved* and *Winning Days*. He

is, Hamish admits, something of a father figure, ready with the advice and showing a fondness for the band that outranks any professional obligation.

"But we always have it with the caveat of... *something could happen*," Andy is saying. "Certainly you can't compare things now to the chaos of before — before it was utter chaos and now it's controlled chaos — but you always feel like people must think that *you're* mental. Like when I was trying to explain to you, aw, can we not do it in the pub? You must have been thinking, what the fuck is wrong with this control freak?"

Revelation No.2

■ The Vines will ride again!

NOW the control freakery is in place, things can roll once more. While there have been gigs, the Vines haven't toured properly since the *Winning Days* meltdown, when it was rumoured they'd only put out albums from then on. But with the release of *Melodia* there are festivals, a tour of Oz later this year, and probable visits to the UK, New York and LA planned. They just won't be running themselves ragged.

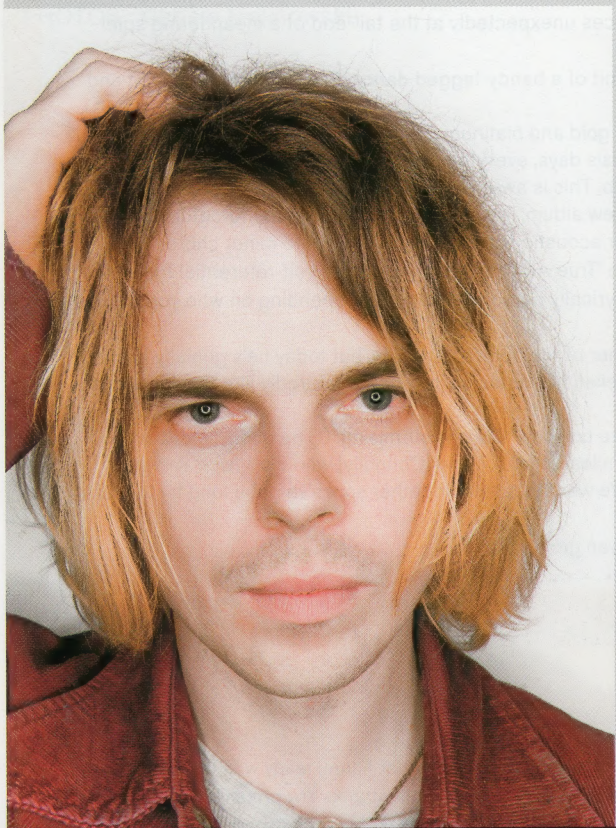
"Me and Ryan were really sick on the last tour we did," Craig remembers with a modicum of pride. "We were in New York, and I don't know how we did it, but we managed to do it. I could barely stand up in my hotel room that day. It was like, I've got to go there and do the show now."

"We knew it was sold out and we hadn't been there for four years, so we made it work and it was really good," he says, confirming Andy's assertion that the Vines, somehow, always deliver. "We took some magic pills... they seemed to work."

"That's what I don't like about playing live," he continues. "The next day I had bruises and cuts all over me. I know Hamish likes playing live, but I'm like, I just lose my mind. I want to play songs — I don't want to be like a football player with all these injuries."

As the story goes, when recording debut *Highly Evolved*, Rob Schnapf had to actually explain to Craig that bands need to tour. A few years down the track, how did everyone else feel about the possibility of not touring again?

"I don't know," shoots back Craig. "Did I say that? We didn't really talk about it — I think that's what other people were saying, because we're supposedly crazy, which I'm not. I never thought about touring in the first place. It was all about the album. We were lucky enough to go to America and get on the cover of *Rolling Stone* and a bunch of shit, but yeah, we've got a new album and we want to play these songs to people. We've got nothing to prove... but we've got everything to prove. We really want to put Australian music back on the map."



Ryan Griffiths



Hamish Rosser



Brad Heald



Craig Nicholls

While every band has acts they enjoy lampooning, if only in the privacy of the rehearsal room, Andy Kelly reckons Craig's unique in that: "I've never, ever heard him slag another band. People try and bait him, but he just thinks that if people make music then it's great. If people start slagging another band he's like, 'Hey, hey, come on — we don't need to talk about that.'" So when I point out it's Aussie electro the world's going berko for right now, Craig just says: "Oh, that's cool. You can be a good band but you've got to be in the right place at the right time, and maybe if electro's getting bought right now, it doesn't matter — because the band who I think is the greatest band in the world, the Redwalls, they only sold a few thousand copies and that doesn't change my opinion of them."

Revelation No.3

■ They're perfectionists

"LET'S talk about the Strokes. They've got a new album coming out." All Craig Nicholls wants to do is talk music — and it doesn't have to be his. He listens to eight hours of the stuff a day — "like a freak" — and, while he finds the process of making it hard to describe or explain, it's definitely his most comfortable topic of conversation.

"Even though we can be immature and evil, there's some goodness there,"

"You can't sell a couple of million albums without nailing it!"

he's saying of *Melodia's* more tender numbers. "Sometimes I don't even know that I've written a song. I can't remember when I did it or how, that sort of thing." How do you find it again? I ask in bafflement. "I just write song titles down in a book; that'll be enough for me to remember it."

That may seem loose, but when asked if he's always trying to scratch an itch with music or if he always feels he's nailing it, Craig fixes me with a *you're-a-joker* stare.

"Yaaaah," he says slowly for my benefit, "I mean... you can't sell a couple of million albums without *nailing* it. It's that hard, there are so many bands, you have to be serious about it. Now we just feel like we've made a sick album and we're fucking done. We don't have to do any more albums like this."

That comment's probably not as final as it sounds, but thinking about Vines label-mate Josh Pyke who, as he revealed at a songwriting summit, pens tunes for other artists, I ask Craig if he'd consider the same.

"I don't think consciously about the band when I'm writing," he reflects, "but I don't think I could write for other people."

Would it feel wrong?

"It's more like... jealous or personal. I don't understand why."

"I've heard Daniel Johns say that he wants to collaborate with you," says Hamish, who has a useful way of feeding Craig anecdotes ("Hamish is the one guy in the band who could book his own flight if he had to," manager Andy confides wryly).

"It would be cool to do something like that," concedes Craig. "But as far as writing songs goes, I don't think about it being for anyone. I don't feel as much desperation with this album as I did with the first album. I needed recognition and attention, and I don't need it now."

Despite the seemingly lax attitude, Andy reveals there's a real underlying perfectionism to the process. "Craig's really obsessed with making sure that the gaps between songs are perfect, so we've had to get three different versions done with different lengths of gaps," he chuckles. "Then he was in here yesterday going: 'I'm really worried, I've got to get that original version back, I'm freaking out...!' And it was the same last album, but with the guitar sound."

"But I must say, all bands have that to an extent. They get fixated on something. It's just Craig's fixating is gold class fixating."

Revelation No.4

■ They're philosophical about the past

"IF ENOUGH time's passed you can reflect on these things and make light of it," says a steady Hamish when asked what it's like revisiting the venues and radio stations that shit went down at (see p16 for Richard Kingsmill's account — although there has been happier visits to triple j since). "At the time it might have been unpleasant, to go back and say, 'I remember when this happened!' It's a bit of a joke sometimes."

"I was thinking about this the other day," says Ryan. "I haven't really reflected on a whole lot because it was so chaotic... and it wasn't all good. There was a lot of pretty tedious travelling and shit that I guess every band has to do, but it seemed a bit ridiculous at times. The novelty wears off pretty quick. Like if you're at home you sort of forget, so you're itching to play. Then you remember, oh yeah, that's right..."

"I feel like people are ready to like the Vines," Andy says later. "It's been a long road and I understand why people, in this country especially, were suspicious of them. People thought they were a put-together band, and it was unusual for a band to sign a deal overseas before here, especially when they're completely chaotic live. That's just not the way it works here. You've got to have paid your dues. But you've met Craig now. You can see why we didn't go: 'Tell you what, mate, we'll put you in a people mover and send you up and down the Hume Highway 20 times so you can really hone your chops. But he had 20 songs demoed that were 20 times better than anything we'd ever heard!'"

While Andy agrees the band wouldn't care or notice, he admits nasty interviews or video clips online of Craig seeming stoned and confused do affect him. "We do feel really protective, and certainly at the height of it all I nearly bashed someone who said to Craig, as he was walking into a TV performance: 'Why don't you kill yourself and do us all a favour?' It enraged

me so much. It enrages me now, just thinking about it. But there are bands that people either love or hate, and if people hate them, you can't change that. The only thing that bothers me is that people think this is an act." He laughs heartily at the idea. "If I found out he's actually got his driver's license I'd be furious!"

Revelation No.5

■ They don't hate journalists... allegedly

"I LIKE it when I read something good about an album and it's descriptive and you get something out of it," Craig insists. "I just feel like more for me, the way I look at it, I kind of... it's almost like I'm not supposed to talk about it."

The music? "Yeah. I just feel like what I am is a brat, and how else can you not write that or see that?" He changes tack. "We never cared about the press. Not that we don't care about you," he hastens to add, to laughter. "But people were saying to me after we'd played or as I was walking on to the stage: 'Aw man, be careful of the *NME*...' Why, what are they fucking gonna do? Call me crazy?"

"It was that classic build-us-up, cut-us-down thing, but that's all right," chips in a zen-like Hamish.

"But they weren't the ones who put us up there," Craig argues, "so they can't be the ones to affect anything. They picked up on us and the Strokes, but fuck, a five-year-old kid could have done that. They just got paid a lot of money for it and got on my case so I had to get violent and all that, but I'm try'na put that shit behind me."

That's why I'm sat over here.

"Sorry, I'll try and stop swearing and everything," he says, even though his *fuckings* are respectfully soft. "It's our first interview for a while... *I wanted it to go well!*" There's a mock sob, and some hur-hurring around the table.

It must be annoying when journalists have used you to make their name though, I offer, annoyingly. Since I've got nothing to lose.

"Thanks for being understanding, yeah," he says with just a dash of dictaphone-smashing spite. "It's like, what does that mean? Sometimes people interview you and they don't really listen to you, it's just part of your job. And I guess *you're* doing it because it's part of your job. And we play for keeps. Playing for keeps is important. Did I mention that I play for keeps? Did that have any impact on your opinion of me?"

The room falls silent. "Um..." I try, followed by a sigh that wasn't meant to be audible.

"Um!" he hoots. "*He says he's not weird, but he's fucking weird!*"

"Ask him why he plays for keeps," Ryan offers helpfully...

“I needed recognition
and attention.
I don’t need it now”



“Even though we can be immature and evil, there’s some goodness there”

Revelation No.6

■ They enjoy photo shoots

THE band lollops off to our nearby shoot, with Craig in particular unfeasibly excited and chipper about it (“I love them. I used to really like them, then I really hated them, now I like them again.”) The atmosphere’s brilliant fun.

The Sydney boys have never been interested in relocating and their ties to home are confirmed by all. It’s also clearly a lot more relaxed now they’re not in the weird-ass bubble of a heavily touring band. “When you come back to Sydney you just want to kiss the ground like the Pope,” Craig chirps. “We did a Beatles song live with the Killers and the day after these guys took us on this cruise around the harbour. It was a really nice day. I’d never even been on anything like that and I live here. It was so nice. I like Melbourne, but I love Sydney’s landmarks.”

“I haven’t been in the salt water for so long,” croaks Ryan. “Are they still putting salt in it?”

Once in the studio, Craig puts the Super Furry Animals on the stereo while photographer Cybele, towering in knee-high boots, cranks up her alternately gentle and dominatrix technique. “Hot!” she murmurs, pinning each wandering Vine against the wall between her legs.

Craig’s barely visible behind the massive flash contraption she’s homing in on him with, like a crazed b-movie scientist with a laser gun. He’s done this before, though, and pulls a startled rabbit face before Brad takes his place. Craig calls out encouragement and dashes in and out for smoke breaks.

“You look like the *Help!*-era Beatles,” I remark as they finish off by throwing shapes against the wall, Brad in his Lennon-style black cap. “Aw, that’s a real compliment!” Craig says as he lolls on the floor, in the Liverpudlian brogue he adopts when joking. “Don’t compliment me; I don’t know how to react.”

Revelation No.7 :

■ They’re really trying hard

OVER the next few days I’m plagued with questions. I know I like them, but am I projecting too much with the protectiveness I’m feeling? The Vines have always elicited a sick-puppy-petting response from ladies who love too much, but is it appropriate here? And am I so used to reading hyperbolox about Craig’s Asperger symptoms that I think it’s okay to write about him falling off his chair? But if I don’t print any of that, will there even be anything left?

Actually, there really isn’t. So here’s the falling off the chair stuff.

When we’re left alone, I ask Craig if he gets letters from people with Asperger Syndrome (or just letters from the disaffected) who see him as a poster boy of weird sorts. He doesn’t so much hedge, as make aborted attempts at explaining, before falling, painfully, back off his chair. “I don’t have a computer,” he finishes helplessly. “I don’t know how it works. I don’t have a phone, I just write fuckin’ albums. You try and live your life. But that Alex from the Arctic Monkeys, his new album’s fucking great...”

Most bands will lament that they only want to talk about the music, but that’s never been more plain than now. Almost every question I level at Craig is met by an answer that ends with a semi-apologetic deference to Super Furry Animals or the Redwalls — and even though I get the feeling he’s really trying hard to make eye contact and help me out with quotes, I know I’m just interrupting his personal musicy reverie. I feel bad.

“People meet him, they shake and cry and they’re so nervous,” marvels manager Andy of the Craig Effect. “I’m so nervous!” It seems as though things going badly solidified their fan base. It’s like: “They’re OUR band! He’s fragile! Everyone leave him alone!” People felt a real kinship with him.

“You can’t be ignorant about going into the music industry these days,” he continues, “but the Vines were. And they still are. They’ve toured the world and played award shows, but they’re still like little kids. There’s this crazy naivety, like Ryan, his constant thing is: ‘Hey... what time do you think it is?’ It’s like,

‘I don’t have to think about what time it is, Ryan, I just look at my watch and I know what time it is.’

“It’s much less so now,” he continues warmly, “but there’s still a part of them asking: ‘So why do we have to do this interview again?’ ‘Well, you know how you want to sell a lot of records?’ ‘Yeah?’ ‘That’s why.’ And they often need assurances about how they’ll get somewhere, but I can’t believe they need to ask. They know that they’ll get escorted to a car or a plane. So it’s very loosey-goosey. But it’s quite charming.”

“It is really hard,” Craig admits, without the usual jokey defence mechanism, when I ask him what it’s like having all your decisions and responsibility taken away from you from such a young age, for such a long time. “Because I never had the ambition to go overseas. When people my age said they wanted to go overseas I never wanted to, but then we went there and it was really fucking crazy. But yeah, you get a tour manager helping you out so you don’t gotta think much, you just play. It’s a really self-indulgent thing. We were really lucky because we went straight to a bus and these big shows. To be a good band you’ve got to have luck as well, something on your side, like a deal or opportunity. We were lucky that we had that.

“I just hope this wasn’t too weird and that you could make sense of it,” he says, amid violent coughs that seem designed to mask this moment, “because I really try. I hear the question you’re asking and I’m not answering it right. I just hear myself talking and I hate it, it’s so pretentious.”

It’s a silly business, interviewing musicians, I say. It’s embarrassing for me.

“It’s embarrassing for ME!” he returns in astonishment. “I feel like there’s no way I can’t sound arrogant, but then if you’re too careful you’re boring. I don’t know. A lot of shit’s happened, a lot of stuff with us doing interviews and that, but it’s kind of funny, I think. As long as no one gets hurt.”

MAMMOTH EXTRAS! To find out what the Vines have been listening to during the making of *Melodia* (out July 12), and to read their track-by-track breakdown of the album, head to: triplej.net.au/jmag